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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: DE-BA'ATHIFICATION: VIEW FROM THE SOUTH

REF: A. BAGHDAD 285
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 310
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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR YURI KIM FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Iraq's southern, Shi'a-dominated provinces have reverberated with public support in favor of the Accountability and Justice Commission's (AJC) exclusion of national election candidates on de-Ba'athification grounds. There were widespread demonstrations against the Cassation Chamber's preliminary February 3 ruling to postpone candidate vetting and appeals until after the election, with some protestors raging against "U.S. and foreign interference" in the judicial panel's decision. Several governors and provincial councils (PC) have latched on to the de-Ba'athification issue as a vote-getting tactic, and to remove rivals from their local administration. There are indications that some of these protests may have been organized, or at least promoted, by Shi'a political parties and/or elements of the GOI itself. Sunni political and tribal leaders are concerned about the increase in sectarian/anti-Sunni rhetoric since the start of the de-Ba'athification drive. END SUMMARY.

WIDESPREAD DEMONSTRATIONS BUT ORGANIZATION MURKY

[1](#)2. (C) Rallies in support of de-Ba'athification of the candidate list for national elections were widespread (refs B-G). The Cassation Chamber's February 3 ruling in favor of postponing some candidate vetting and appeals until after the election (ref A) sparked an immediate reaction across the south, including in Diwaniyah, Karbala, Maysan, and Basrah, culminating in a large protest march in Baghdad on February [1](#)7. (COMMENT: Those localized reactions contributed significantly to the political pressure that eventually compelled the Cassation Chamber to reverse course and complete a hasty vetting process that reinstated only 26 candidates. END COMMENT.) While governors and Provincial Council (PC) leaders intimated to PRT representatives that these demonstrations were an outpouring of public emotion, it is not clear who organized these events, or how much of a role political parties played. Most of these protests featured banners and signs sponsored by the Political Prisoners' Foundation, a GOI foundation that provides compensation to victims and prisoners of the previous regime. (NOTE: The deputy chair of the parliamentary Martyrs' Committee, Najiha Abd al-Amir al Habib--INA/Da'wa--complained to poloff in early January that the GOI had been slow to disperse compensation to former prisoners, and

predicted that this would become a campaign issue. END NOTE.)

INA, SLA ORGANIZE DUELING DEMOS

¶3. (C) Da'wa Council of Representatives (COR) staff member Ahmed Mofeed acknowledged to poloffs February 8 that "most parties" were using their internal martyrs' and political prisoners' committees to organize these demonstrations. PM Maliki's chief of staff, Tariq Abdullah, told DCM February 10 that political parties as well as local citizens' groups were involved in these events. Emad Kalentar, an NGO activist in Najaf (secular Shi'a), told poloff February 13 that most of these demonstrations were essentially campaign events between the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) and the PM's State of Law Alliance (SLA), and cautioned that both coalitions were edging into sectarian rhetoric in trying to outdo one another. Qedging into sectarian rhetoric in trying to outdo one another.

"CLEANSING" LOCAL GOVERNMENT ALL TALK?

¶4. (C) Several PCs have issued resolutions calling for the removal of Ba'athists, while Baghdad Governor Abd al-Razzaq (SLA/Da'wa) apparently launched a one-man crusade to cleanse the ranks of local employees (ref G). Diwaniyah (Qadisiyah) and Najaf PCs ordered local employees who were former officials of the Saddam regime to turn in their weapons. Kalentar observed to poloff that Karbala's provincial government has not limited itself to anti-Saddam propaganda "like the others," but has been "dangerously overzealous" in seeking to remove local employees for tenuous connections to the previous regime, in order to curry favor with voters. While most provincial governments have not specified how they will assess current employees, the Karbala PC formed a provincial Accountability and Justice Committee to review personnel files in all government departments (ref F) and appears to have started removing employees of specific directorates (septel forthcoming).

¶5. (C) In the midst of the uproar, some officials privately admit that they are pandering to voters as part of election year politics. On February 9, the Wasit PC voted to expel Ba'athists and former Fedayeen Saddam commandos from local government positions and the security services, and to refer them to the national AJC. Wasit Governor Latif al-Turfah (Da'wa) told poloff later that day that this was a calculated political move to play into the national mood against Ba'athism. He asserted that the resolution would have no impact on the Iraqi Security Forces and would not undermine local security institutions. Najaf Governor Adnan Zurfi (Da'wa) told PRToffs on February 8 that he knew several hundred retired officials of the former government who were living peacefully in his province, and that he could distinguish between ordinary rank and file party members and the dangerous Saddam sympathizers who were trying to find a new role in government. Septel forthcoming.

WORRIES ABOUT SECTARIAN TENOR OF DE-BA'ATHIFICATION

¶6. (C) While IHEC's numbers indicate that many Shi'a candidates were on the national de-Ba'athification exclusion order (with cross-sectarian coalitions taking the hardest hit, as reported ref I), Sunni political and tribal leaders are worried about what they regard as increasing sectarian rhetoric across the country (refs J-K). Paramount sheikhs from several major tribal confederations told Ambassador February 10 that the current election campaign was off to a bitter start, due to efforts to remove local officials from their posts in Baghdad and across the south without adequate review. Iraqiyya list MP Maysoon Damluji told CDA February 15 that this increase in tensions was undermining Sunnis' sense of security and could drive some back to militant activity to protect their communities.

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